

Natural Resource Conservation Programs

A Guide for Landowners on Federal, State, and Local Government Cost-share Programs That Provide Assistance for Land Stewardship and Conservation Practices.

developed by the

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INTRODUCTION:

Natural resource conservation projects require careful planning and thought. Before undertaking any project consider these following steps carefully.

1. **Determine your management goals.** This means you will need to sit down and identify your land management goals and set priorities. Technical assistance for evaluating the natural resources on your property and developing management alternatives is available from the U.S.D.A. Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), the Nebraska Forest Service (NFS), and the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission (NE G&PC). The next step will be to develop a management plan for your property based on this information.
2. **Develop a management plan for your property.** Most cost-share assistance programs will require that you develop a formal management plan for your property and a specific plan for any projects that you may wish to undertake. Contact your local Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), Nebraska Forest Service (NFS), or Nebraska Game and Parks Commission (NE G&PC) office for technical assistance in developing a management plan for your property.
3. **Decide which project best addresses your goals at this time.** Base your decision on the goals and objectives defined in your management plan, the availability of cost-share assistance program dollars, and your financial resources.
4. **Find out which cost-share programs apply to your project.** Examine the list of cost-share programs in this brochure and decide which program applies most directly to your project goals and needs.
5. **Contact the organization responsible for managing the program.** Most cost-share programs will allow you to sign up before you know exactly what or how much you want to accomplish. Be sure to find out about program restrictions such as sign-up periods, payment schedules, and application procedures.
6. **Begin work on your project.** Do not begin work on a project until you receive approval. Failure to follow this procedure may lead to your project being canceled. The notice of approval will state how much cost-share assistance for which your project qualified.
7. **Project completion.** Make sure you obtain receipts for all expenditures, including supplies, labor and equipment. After the project is completed, contact the organization responsible for managing the program under which you applied and they will send out a representative who will inspect the site to certify that the project meets program standards and specifications. Once the appropriate agency has certified the project, they will issue a check for the portion of the project successfully completed. Be sure to keep copies of all project records for tax purposes.

COST-SHARE PROGRAMS

CONSERVATION RESERVE PROGRAM (CRP)

The Conservation Reserve Program is a voluntary program that offers annual rental payments and cost-share assistance to establish short-term resource conserving covers on eligible land. The Commodity Credit Corporation makes annual rental payments based on the agriculture rental value of the land and provides cost-share assistance in an amount up to 50 percent of the participant's cost of establishing an approved practice. The current continuous sign-up offers some interesting possibilities for tree planting on cropland. Some of the practices eligible under the continuous sign-up include:

<u>Practices</u>	<u>Contract length (years)</u>	<u>Incentive bonuses</u>
Field windbreak establishment	10 - 15	20%
Shelterbelt establishment	10 - 15	
Living snowfences	10	
Riparian buffers	10-15	20%

Landowners should contact their county Farm Services Agency or Natural Resources Conservation Service for more information about this program.

ENVIRONMENTAL QUALITY INCENTIVES PROGRAM (EQIP)

The Environmental Quality Incentive program (EQIP) is administered jointly by the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) and the Farm Services Agency (FSA). EQIP combines the responsibilities of the Agricultural Conservation Program (ACP), the Great Plains Conservation Program (GPCP), the Water Quality Incentive program (WQIP), and the Colorado River Basin Salinity Control Program (CRSCP) into one program. The purpose of EQIP is to provide flexible assistance to agricultural producers that face the most serious threats to soil, water, air, and related natural resources by providing both technical assistance and cost-share assistance to make beneficial cost-effective changes to cropping systems, grazing management, manure and nutrient management, integrated pest management, and irrigation water management. Cost-share assistance will be available only to landowners with property in identified priority areas or who have projects that will address statewide natural resource concerns. Landowners should contact their county Natural Resources Conservation Service or Farm Services Agency for more information about this program.

FORESTRY INCENTIVE PROGRAM (FIP)

The Forestry Incentive program provides cost-share assistance for tree planting and/or timber stand improvement to insure that a variety of forest products will be available to meet future demands. Funding is limited to highly productive land that is capable of producing a marketable timber crop. Private forest landowners, including corporations whose stocks are not publicly traded, may receive funding if they own at least 10 acres of eligible forest land but no more than 1,000 acres. Landowners are required to develop a forest management plan written and/or approved by the Nebraska Forest Service. Contact the Nebraska Forest Service, or your county Farm Services Agency or Natural Resources Conservation Service office for more information on this program.

LOWER ELKHORN NRD=S AGROFORESTRY INCENTIVES PROGRAM (AIP)

The Agroforestry Incentives Program provides cost-share assistance to agricultural producers and non-industrial private forest landowners for management activities including reforestation and afforestation; timber stand improvement; agroforestry; windbreak establishment and renovation; protection and improvement of riparian areas and wetlands; fisheries and wildlife habitat improvement. To be eligible for cost-share assistance a landowner must have a signed request for assistance for their project. The Agroforestry Incentives Program will pay cost-share assistance at 65 percent of actual costs not to exceed \$1,000 per acre or \$3,500 per project and projects must be at least one-half acre in size. Lands that do not qualify for enrollment in this program are property within the corporate limits of a city or village and publicly owned or operated lands. Contact the Lower Elkhorn NRD or your county Natural Resources Conservation Service office for more information on this program.

NEBRASKA SOIL AND WATER CONSERVATION PROGRAM (NSWCP)

The Nebraska Soil and Water Conservation Program provides cost-share assistance to agricultural producers and private landowners for conservation and environmental practices on agricultural lands that improve or enhance soil and water conservation practices. Projects that qualify for cost-share assistance within the Lower Elkhorn Natural Resources District are dams, terraces, and terrace outlets. Contact the Lower Elkhorn NRD or your county Natural Resources Conservation Service office for more information on this program.

Nebraska Wildlife Shelterbelt Program (NWSP)

The Purpose of Nebraska Game and Wildlife Commission's Wildlife Shelterbelt Program is to assist landowners in the establishment of large shelterbelts. Program participants will receive financial incentives that will cover nearly all of the costs associated with shelterbelt establishment. This program is separate and distinct from the Commission's Wildlife Habitat Improvement Program (WHIP), which is administered by cooperating Natural Resources Districts. To qualify for cost-share assistance shelterbelts must contain a minimum of five rows of trees and shrubs and no more than twelve rows in width and be at least 1/4 mile long. Contact the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission for more information on this program.

Pheasants Forever Cost-Share Program

Pheasants Forever is a private, non-profit organization that promotes habitat restoration and improvement projects for pheasants and wildlife on private lands. Cost-share assistance for projects will vary from chapter to chapter. Program funds are often piggybacked on other cost-share programs, especially the Wildlife Habitat Improvement Program, and may be used for the establishment of wildlife windbreaks, food plots, and nesting cover. The organization does not financially support pheasant stocking. Contact your local Pheasants Forever chapter, the Lower Elkhorn NRD or your county Natural Resources Conservation Service office for more information on this program.

Stewardship Incentive program (SIP)

The Stewardship Incentive program provides cost-share assistance to agricultural landowners and private non-industrial forest landowners for management activities designed to develop and/or improve riparian areas, natural woodlands, field windbreaks, wildlife habitat, or conservation tree planting projects. Qualifying land includes rural land with existing tree cover or other woody vegetation or land that is suitable for growing such vegetation and is privately owned by an individual, group, association, corporation, Indian tribe, or other private legal entity. To be eligible for cost-share assistance a landowner must have a Forest Stewardship Management Plan for their property, written and/or approved by the Nebraska Forest Service. The Stewardship Incentive Program will pay cost-share assistance at 65 percent of actual costs not to exceed \$1,000 per acre and projects must be at least one acre in size. Lands that do not qualify for enrollment in this program are property within the corporate limits of a city or village and publicly owned or operated lands. Contact the Nebraska Forest Service, Lower Elkhorn NRD or your county Farm Services Agency or Natural Resources Conservation Service office for more information on this program.

Wildlife Habitat Improvement Program (WHIP)

The Wildlife Habitat Improvement Program in the Lower Elkhorn Natural Resources District is administered jointly by the Lower Elkhorn NRD, the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission, and the Natural Resources Conservation Service. Funding for this program is a cooperative effort with 75 percent of the funds being provided through the Game and Parks Commission's Habitat Stamp Fund and 25 percent from the Lower Elkhorn NRD. This program is designed to create new habitat and to enhance existing habitat through contracts with landowners. Practices offered to landowners in the Lower Elkhorn NRD are:

- ! The establishment of permanent habitat for wildlife on existing cropland.
- ! The establishment of permanent habitat for wildlife in riparian zone areas.
- ! Permanent wetland enhancement.
- ! The improvement of existing wildlife habitat.
- ! Free seed for set aside acres.
- ! Tree planting and food plots on Conservation Reserves Acres

Lands that do not qualify for enrollment in this program are land within the corporate limits of a city or village, publicly owned or operated lands, and land within 200 yards of inhabited dwellings, active feedlots or planned housing developments. Contact the Lower Elkhorn NRD, the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission or your county Natural Resources Conservation Service office for more information on this program.

Program	Cost-Share Rate¹	Annual Payment	Maximum payment	Minimum Size	Maximum Size	Contract Length
Conservation Reserve Program	50 percent	yes ²	\$50,000/year ³	none	none	10-15 years
Environmental Quality Incentive Program ⁴	75 percent	none	\$10,000/year ⁵	none	none	5 - 10 years
Forestry Incentive Program	65 percent	none	\$10,000/year	10 acres	1,000 acres	10 years
Agroforestry Incentives Program	65 percent	none	\$3,500/ year	2 acre	none	10 years
Nebraska Soil and Water Conservation Program	75 percent	none				10 years
Nebraska Wildlife Shelterbelt Program ⁶	100 percent	none	none	5 rows	12 rows	20 years
Pheasant Forever Cost-share Program	Funds through this program are available as free seedlings, seed for food plots, cost-share support or one-time bonus payments.					
Stewardship Incentive Program	65 percent	none	\$10,000/year	1 acre	1,000 acres	10 years
Wildlife Habitat Improvement Program	The Wildlife Habitat Improvement Program has many programs each with different and specific cost-share rates, annual payment rates, and contract lengths. Contact the Lower Elkhorn NRD, the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission or your county Natural Resources Conservation Service office for more information on this program.					

- 1 Cost-share assistance is paid as a percentage of actual costs not to exceed State or NRD approved rates.
- 2 Annual contract rental payments are determined by the the average soil rental rate within the contracted area.
- 3 The \$50,000/year limit applies only to annual rental payments. There is no limit to the amount of cost-share assistance that a landowner may receive.
- 4 Cost-share assistance under the EQIP program will vary depending on type of project and whether the project is in a priority area or whether it qualifies as a statewide resource concern.
- 5 Cost-share assistance under the EQIP program has a maximum limit of \$10,000/year not to exceed \$50,000 for the entire contract period.
- 6 Nebraska's Wildlife Shelterbelt Program will pay up to 100 percent of the cost of establishing a wildlife shelterbelt however due to limited funds only one to two shelterbelts are funded in each of the Commission's districts annually.